

Books and the School Library

Obsolete or Optimized?

Annette Lamb and Larry Johnson

In the past decade, millions of older books have been digitized and most new books are being published in digital formats. Are paper books obsolete? Or is technology optimizing the book experience?

THE SHIFT FROM PHYSICAL TO DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

In 2009, the school library at Cushing Academy in Boston announced that it was going bookless. Later it was learned that although print books were largely gone, the school was not able to totally eliminate printed texts. The next year, Benilde-St. Margaret's School Library in Minneapolis eliminated most of its print collection.

In both cases, the moves were made to free up the physical library space for use as a learning and information commons. This approach required expanded investment in online databases and digital book collections. At Cushing, it was recognized that students required more help to use the online resources, and an additional librarian was hired.

At Benilde-St. Margaret, success for the digital shift relied on a surrounding community with neighboring branch public libraries along with university libraries. The school's principal noted that their intention wasn't to eliminate all books but to avoid duplication with other libraries (Barack, 2013).

In 2012, the Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School (PA Cyber) opened its virtual library to students. They provide e-books, databases for magazines, newspapers, images, and primary source materials. In addition, the cyber library mails out print materials including physical books (Barack, 2012).

This shift doesn't signal the death of the paper book; however, it does indicate a change in thinking about the role of books in school libraries.

THE REAL WORLD OF LIBRARIES AND BOOKS

Although the shift from physical to digital collections is occurring rapidly in some school libraries, change will be slow in others. Liz Gray (2010), the library director at Dana Hall School in Wellesley, MA, suggested that "libraries need to hold on to things that work well even as they keep up with new technologies."

William Powers (2010) noted, "The idea that books are outdated is based on a common misconception: the belief that new technologies automatically render existing ones obsolete, as the automobile did with the buggy whip. However, this isn't always the case. Old technologies often handily survive the introduction of new ones, and sometimes become useful in entirely new ways."

In looking at the traditional publishing industry in terms of a market economy, we have goods and services (books and information) that require transport systems (publishing to booksellers) to deliver desired content/titles to users/buyers. In recent decades, the industry has been impacted by the shift to e-books, electronic databases, and other related digital forms, but the market is still controlled by materials, production, and delivery costs, as well as the profits earned in the delivery of desired goods. Customer preference for those goods is paramount, and today we have a growing number of people who are comfortable with or prefer reading information on their Kindle, Nook, or other e-book reader. At the same time, we still have significant numbers of people who prefer reading the printed page. In many areas, printed books aren't dead—they're alive and healthy.

Though a few schools have pioneered the digital movement, there has not been a huge surge of other school libraries going totally bookless. However, this may be due more to library budgets and the inability to take on the added costs of making such changes rather than a preference for more traditional school library resources. Schools across the country have cut back purchases of library materials for budgetary reasons, and today many school collections have fewer books than in the past while trying to devote more monies toward electronic databases, e-books, and other digital resources.

Over time, reading preferences are changing. In 2012, e-books in some disciplines and genres began outselling print books for the first time. E-book reader displays continue to improve and drop in price. The move toward e-books and digital information will continue, but currently not every book or article is available in digital form.

BOOKS AND THE COMMON CORE

Schools and most school librarians are involved with implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The standards expect students to read and understand increasingly complex texts not only in English and language arts but across the curriculum.

Working with teachers to revise the curriculum and select materials that address these standards, school librarians have shifted their attention from fiction to nonfiction works and informational



JUNIOR FICTION

WIZARDS AND DRAGONS AND MAGIC, OH MY!

Breitrose, Prudence. **Mousemobile.** Hyperion, 2013. 288p. \$16.99. 978-1-423-17412-7. Grades 3-7. Eleven-year-old Megan and her cousin Joey, working with highly intelligent mice using tiny computers behind the scenes to prevent climate change, rush to the rescue when the Mouse Nation is threatened with extermination.

De Lint, Charles. **Seven Wild Sisters.** Little, Brown, 2014. 260p. \$18. 978-0-316-05356-3. Grades 3-7. When Sarah Jane finds a tiny man shot full of arrows and takes him to Aunt Lillian for help, they're caught up in a war between fairy clans, with Sarah Jane's sisters as hostages on both sides.

George, Jessica Day. **Wednesdays in the Tower.** Bloomsbury, 2013. 229p. \$16.99. 978-1-59990-645-4. Grades 3-7. Castle Glower adds and subtracts rooms on Tuesdays, so it surprises Princess Celie to find a new room (containing a huge griffin egg) on Wednesday. Now, the castle wants Celie to care for the hatchling in secret. Why is it so important?

Matthews, Patrick. **Dragon Run.** Scholastic, 2013. 325p. \$16.99. 978-0-545-45068-3. Grades 3-7. On Testing Day, all twelve-year-olds are assigned a rank in society. The higher the number, the better your future--but Al is a zero. He's shunned by society, on the run from the Cullers--but he's the one who'll discover the truth.

Reeve, Philip. **Goblins.** Scholastic, 2013. 352p. \$17.99. 978-0-545-22220-4. Grades 3-7. Skarper, an outcast goblin, and Henwyn, a cheesewright's son who longs to be a hero, become allies with an aging princess and three bumbling wizards in the fight to save Clovenstone from the Lych Lord and his henchmen.

reading. However, the format for these new materials is a primary concern--should school libraries invest in paper or digital materials? It's likely that the answer will be both!

The CCSS website provides lists of text exemplars (CCSS, 2012) to help educators begin to identify works that meet instructional needs. Many state departments of education have developed their own booklists, as well as many publishers.

The suggested books include titles you probably already have in your print collection, such as *Little House in the Big Woods* published in 1932. However, many of the recent works, such as *Moonshot: The Flight of Apollo 11*, have been published in both e-book and hardcover formats.

The Watsons Go to Birmingham 1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis is available in a wide range of formats, including hardcover, e-book, audiobook, Audible book, and Playaway.

When making new purchases, think about the needs of students and teachers. What book format works best in particular classroom situations? Do all students have access to e-book readers or other devices for electronic reading? What's the most efficient, effective, and appealing resource for a particular situation? For instance, what's the cost of a class set of books versus an electronic set? At what point does it become cost effective for a class set of e-book readers?

ENHANCING TRADITIONAL BOOK COLLECTIONS

Paper books are still being purchased for most school library collections. School librarians and teachers use a variety of online resources to assist in their search and selection of books. Traditionally, jobbers such as Baker & Taylor, Ingram Library Services, and Follett's Titlewave have been used to purchase the majority of library texts. However, these services are better for new works. Many of the books on the recommended booklists are older titles that may no longer be in print.

Vendor websites are a good place to start when seeking titles beyond your nor-

mal jobber. Amazon <<http://www.amazon.com/>> is probably the best known option and can be used to check the availability and current pricing of books. Customer reviews, samples of Audible audio editions, and previews are often provided.

Most "brick and mortar" bookstores, such as Barnes and Noble <<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/>> and Books-a-Million <<http://www.booksamillion.com/>>, have an online presence. These websites are a good place to locate new books. However, they're also a place to seek recent but not newly published books. In other words, they often have a warehouse of overstocked books from the past several years.

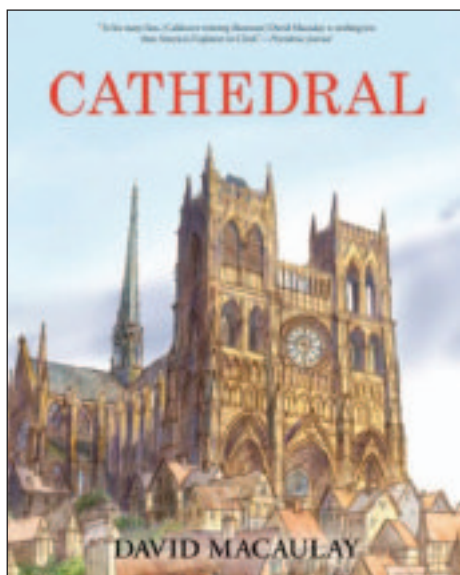
Sometimes the need for a specific out-of-print book leads to searching for used books online. Amazon lists used books for sale from other vendors, but a search can be made directly to online marketplaces for used, rare, and out-of-print books, like AbeBooks <<http://www.abebooks.com/>>, the independent bookstore Powell's Books <<http://www.powells.com/>>, Biblio <<http://www.biblio.com/>>, or Alibris <<http://www.alibris.com/>>.

Rather than visiting the bookseller websites individually, librarians can search for books at BookFinder <<http://www.bookfinder.com/>>. The site serves as a "book price comparison for sale" search engine by searching dozens of bookseller sites. This allows the user to find the best possible price and condition. Of course, when buying used books, one must rely on the seller's description. Unless there are only a few copies available, it's usually best to look for a *new*, *like new*, or *very good* book classification.

Sometimes it's not possible to locate a new copy of a book in a hardcover or library binding. Many online services will rebind paperbacks with a library binding.

Stay on the lookout for revised versions and reissues of older books. Many of the books on the popular book lists are being republished. For instance, *Cathedral: The Story of Its Construction* by David Macaulay, originally published in 1973, has recently been revised and republished in full color.

Finally, many school libraries are reach-



Cathedral: The Story of its Construction by David Macaulay

ing out to borrow texts through interlibrary loan or directing students to local public libraries to supplement their own collections and meet student interests and needs. Online public-access catalogs can be useful in locating these materials. Many regional groups and consortia are forming union catalogs to help in sharing print resources. This will become even more important as fewer print materials are purchased.

BUILDING DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

Before jumping into building a digital collection, it's important to do some planning.

Begin by exploring what might already be available through your state or region. For instance, you may have access to scholarly works from Alexander Street Press, the eBook Collection from EBSCOhost, or Gale Virtual Reference Library.

Also check with your local public library. They may already have an e-book subscription service. Overdrive <<http://www.overdrive.com/>> is a popular example. Remember that the public library's service may be geared to all ages. Consider choosing a service that complements rather than overlaps with this service.

Use the school library budget for a service specifically designed to meet the needs of youth. Common e-book providers include Tumblebooks <[books.com>, Follett e-books <<http://www.aboutfollettebooks.com/>>, and Axis 360 <<http://www.btol.com/axis360/>> by Baker and Taylor. In addition, many schools are subscribing to digital services specifically geared to address standards, such as Scholastic's BookFlix, FreedomFlix, and Storaia.](http://www.tumble-</p>
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However, for individual titles you may need to go directly to a publisher's website. For instance, *Garden Helpers* by National Geographic is a recommended book on many of the standards lists, but it's no longer in print. Instead, National Geographic is providing an electronic version of *Garden Helpers* <<http://ngexplorer.cengage.com/ngyoungexplorer/0909/readstory.html>> on their website as part of their Young Explorer! series. *Wind Power* by National Geographic <<http://ngexplorer.cengage.com/ngyoungexplorer/readstory.html>> is another example.



Garden Helpers by National Geographic

It may seem expensive to build a digital collection, but it's possible to save money. Many works recommended for addressing the standards can be found online for free and can be loaded on all the school's e-book readers. In addition, links can be provided at the school website so students can download these books on their own devices at no cost. The following are recommended books that can be downloaded from Archive.org <<https://archive.org/>>

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain (1876)

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll (1865)

All Things Considered by Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1908)

Democracy in America by Alexis de Toqueville (1835)

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott (1868)

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett (1911)

Walden by Henry David Thoreau (1854)

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by Frank L. Baum (1900)

Many very early works, such as *The Odyssey* by Homer, *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka, and *Elements* by Euclid are available through Project Gutenberg <<http://www.gutenberg.org/>>. Open Library <<https://openlibrary.org/>> is another good place to seek out classic literature.

Google Books <<http://books.google.com>> provides full text of many public domain books, and it is also useful for previews. For some learning activities, students just need to read the introduction or first chapter of a book. *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World* by Mark Kurlansky is an example. Students can read the prologue of the book online at Google Books <<http://books.google.com/books?id=czRsuc9K18wC>>.

Rather than investing in poetry anthologies that may not have all of the recommended works, consider whether online resources can be used. Many works of poetry can be found online, such as poems by Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickinson, and Phillis Wheatley. Even better, it's possible to find digital versions of first editions, such as *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* by Phillis Wheatley <<https://archive.org/stream/poemsonvariousu00whea>>



Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral by Phillis Wheatley published in 1773.



JUNIOR FICTION

HEROES AND REBELS

Bacon, Lee. **Joshua Dread, the Nameless Hero**. Delacorte, 2013. 304p. \$16.99. 978-0-385-74186-6. Grades 3-7. Joshua (son of supervillains The Dread Duo) wants a normal summer with his friends. Instead, they're sent to Gyfted and Talented, a mysterious summer camp that trains super-powered kids. Joshua, a celebrity superhero? This won't end well

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Klimo, Kate. **Dog Diaries: Barry**. Random House, 2013. 160p. \$12.99. 978-0-449-81281-5. Grades 2-5. Barry, an Alpenhunde ("dog of the Alps," later called "Saint Bernards"), lives and trains at the Great Saint Bernard Hospice in the Swiss Alps in the 1800s, rescuing travelers from the White Death (snow).

Lyga, Barry. **Yesterday Again**. Scholastic, 2013. 337p. \$16.99. 978-0-545-19654-3. Grades 4-8. Twelve-year-old Kyle Camden, aka The Azure Avenger (prankster and unintentional town archvillian) wants to time-travel back far enough to prove the town superhero is an alien, but lands in 1987, with no technology to help him get back.

McKissack, Patricia C., Frederick L., and John. **Clone Codes**. Scholastic, 2010. 192p. \$16.99. 978-0-439-92983-7. Grades 6-8. Leanna's life is turned upside-down when her mom's secret is revealed: she's part of the Liberty Bell Movement, a group fighting for freedom for enslaved cyborgs and clones. That's not the biggest family secret, though.

Maddison, Kate. **The Incredible Charlotte Sycamore**. Holiday House, 2013. 282p. \$17.95. 978-0-823-42737-6. Grades 6-10. When Charlotte (daughter of the royal surgeon) and her friends are mauled by rabid mechanical dogs, they put their skills at medicine, swordplay, and disguise to work to discover who's using the dogs to threaten Queen Victoria.

published in 1773. Reading poems in their original form adds an interesting dimension to the works.

The standards encourage teachers to incorporate essays and speeches into their classroom. The text of many public domain works can be found online. Wikisource <<http://en.wikisource.org/>> is a great place to start. The text of Frederick Douglass's July 2, 1852, speech "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July" <http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/What_to_the_Slave_is_the_Fourth_of_July> is available.

Many essays originally published in newspapers and journals can also be found online. For example, the *New York Times* <<http://www.nytimes.com/search/>> can be searched back to 1851. The essay "Solitude and Society" by Ralph Waldo Emerson was published in the December 1857 edition of the *Atlantic Monthly* <<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/issues/1857dec/emerson.htm>>.

While many people are familiar with Google Books, most educators aren't aware of its magazine option <<http://books.google.com/books/magazines/language/en>>. Articles in *LIFE* magazine <<http://books.google.com/books?id=NOEEAAAAMBAJ>> can be located back to the 1930s.

THE FUTURE OF BOOKS IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES

At present, books are still alive and well in schools and school libraries. The marketplace will determine the form of materials published in the future. Print books may continue to decline in use, but for the present, some publications are only available in print. An increasing number of books are published in print, e-book, and audiobook editions, and some new books and journals are only being published in electronic form.

School libraries need to think about how to optimize learning experiences by providing the best reading experiences regardless of whether the resource is paper or electronic.

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